



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



# Leveraging micro-influencers for sustainable marketing: Insights from digital campaigns

ISH MALHOTRA \* and ABIR SETH

*School of Business Studies, Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, Delhi-110034, India.*

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(03), 2701-2708

Publication history: Received on 10 November 2024; revised on 26 December 2024; accepted on 28 December 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.3.3895>

## Abstract

The necessity to protect our environment is becoming more widely recognized. For this reason, "sustainable," or eco-friendly, marketing is gaining popularity. This study examines the ways in which digital marketing platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok can encourage consumers to adopt eco-friendly practices. This study included a variety of case studies, surveys, and content analysis. Additionally, the study discovered that social media celebrities, or "influencers," can aid in raising knowledge and fostering confidence in these environmentally beneficial, or "green," practices. According to our research, people are more likely to trust eco-friendly methods and products when you are genuine and tell the truth. By delivering stories that align with their principles, small-scale influencers are particularly adept at engaging particular groups.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Marketing; Social-Media; Influencer Marketing; Digital Marketing

## 1. Introduction

The dynamic factors that can be attributed to climate change, resource scarcity, and pollution have intensified with regard to sustainable development in different areas. In a drive to ensure that corporate strategies, policies, and goals are directed towards attainment of environmental goals, sustainable marketing has been advantageous in modifying consumer behaviour towards environmentally friendly alternatives.

In its simplest terms, sustainable marketing promotes environmentally friendly products or causes while also encouraging behavioural change.

Digital marketing has become one of the promising ways of business communication and opens great opportunities for brands. Social networks like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube present rich contexts for appealing and impactful representation of the crucial initiatives of businesses in the sphere of sustainability. At the same time, influencer marketing has become one of the pillars of the primary generic tools of digital activities, which rely on individuals' authority to promote the messages.

Nevertheless, integration of these two powerful instruments with sustainability is still a relatively unexplored subject, raising crucial questions about their ability to produce actual change in consumers' behaviour.

However, there is still a number of limitations in terms of sustainable marketing at the moment. This era of perceived environmentalism or greenwashing has skewed consumer confidence, and cultural or demographic disparities cause divergent perceptions of sustainability initiatives. Moreover, the future permanence of campaign-generated

\* Corresponding author: ISH MALHOTRA

connections or engagement with segmentation and socio-demographic groups rather than just a technology buzz seems dubious.

Therefore, the purpose of this present paper is to provide a research gap by examining the effects of digital platforms and influencers on sustainable consumer behavior. Taking the data from given literature, cases and consumer research, this paper provides instructions for business, how to develop understandable, ethical and measurable campaigns to contribute increasing the existing knowledge about brands' ways how to sell products effectively to achieve considerable progress in international environmental targets.

---

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was adopted to provide a detailed case-by-case examination of how digital marketing tools and influencers promote sustainability. This design examines actual events within their ecosystems to understand how such tactics may be operationalized and evaluated for influencing consumer behaviour.

### 2.2. Data Collection Methods

#### 2.2.1. Case Study Analysis

- Objective: To investigate how companies utilize digital marketing and influencer techniques to advocate for sustainable behaviours and attitudes.
- Selection Criteria: Case brands include sustainable marketing award winners, nominees, and renowned brands like Patagonia, as well as newer eco-focused companies.
- Data Source: Secondary data from company reports, campaign materials, press releases, social media posts, influencer collaborations, and online articles. Publicly available metrics on campaign engagement from platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) and brand reports were analyzed.

Procedure:

- A thorough examination of 4-5 case studies from industries such as fashion, food, and electronics.
- Focused analysis of campaign objectives, content types, influencer involvement, and engagement strategies.
- Sustainability messaging, digital marketing strategies, and influencer participation were assessed.

#### 2.2.2. Social Media Content Analysis

- Objective: To analyze influencer posts promoting sustainability to understand how they share environmentally conscious behaviours.

Procedure: A sample of 30 influencer posts from Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube was analyzed.

Content was evaluated for message types (e.g., promotions, lifestyle changes, educational content) and engagement levels (likes, shares, comments).

Both macro- and micro-influencers were considered to study the impact of audience size.

#### 2.2.3. Expert Interviews

- Objective: To gather insights from practitioners in digital marketing and sustainability.

Procedure:

5-7 participants were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires.

Interviews focused on experiences with sustainable marketing campaigns, the use of influencers, and future prospects.

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed for thematic analysis.

## 2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

### 2.3.1. Thematic Analysis

Collected data from case studies, social media posts, and interviews were analyzed for patterns like authenticity, transparency, storytelling, engagement, and consumer trust.

### 2.3.2. Content Analysis

Social media content and influencer campaigns were analyzed for engagement metrics, message structure, and call-to-action effectiveness.

### 2.3.3. Cross-Case Analysis

Findings from case studies were compared to identify the best approaches for promoting sustainability marketing.

## 2.4. Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the study's objectives.
- **Confidentiality:** Anonymity of participants and firms was ensured.
- **Data Security:** Data access was restricted to authorized personnel.
- **Respect for Intellectual Property:** Secondary data was used as per copyright permissions.

### Limitations

- **Public Data Availability:** Dependency on publicly available data may limit the comprehensiveness.
- **Context-Specific Findings:** Case-specific results may not generalize across all sectors.
- **Lack of Consumer Feedback:** The absence of consumer surveys limits direct insights.

## 2.5. Case Study Findings

Through the analysis of four major brands (Patagonia, The Body Shop, IKEA, and Everlane), the following trends were identified:

**Table 1** Sustainability Message and Digital Strategy

Brand	Focus Area	Key Sustainability Practices	Marketing Strategies	Engagement Level
Patagonia	Environmental conservation, recycling	Promoting eco-friendly product use, recycling initiatives	Partnerships with environmental advocates, strong sustainability messaging	Very High (established brand image)
The Body Shop	Cruelty-free cosmetics	Ethical sourcing, no animal testing	Social media storytelling, user-generated content, campaigns with credible representatives	Moderate (focus on credibility)
IKEA	Circular economy	Circular economy practices, tips on sustainable living	Social media posts, TV ads, partnerships with sustainability-conscious home décor influencers	High (complex engagement strategies)
Everlane	Social justice, transparency, humane wages, environmental conservation	Showcasing sustainable fashion line, transparency in production processes	Green celebrities promoting sustainable clothing, partnerships with sustainable fashion advocates	Low (new market entrant)

## 2.6. Key Insights

- Patagonia stood out due to its long-term commitment to sustainability and its strategic use of focused formats for creating awareness and promotion.

- IKEA successfully utilized influencer collaborations that provided sustainable lifestyle tips, effectively engaging a broader audience.
- While The Body Shop and Everlane effectively employed influencer strategies, they were unable to achieve the same level of consumer engagement as Patagonia and IKEA. This was primarily due to their positioning, which appeals to niche rather than mass-market audiences.

## 2.7. Social Media Content Analysis

The analysis of 30 influencer posts across Instagram and TikTok highlighted the following content types and strategies:

**Table 2** Content Type and Engagement Metrics

Content Type	Average Engagement Rate	Message Focus	Engagement Insights
Product Promotion	5.4%	Focusing on environmentally friendly products (e.g., fashionable items).	Increased attention when products are shown integrated into everyday life.
Lifestyle Change (Sustainability Tips)	6.1%	Adopting sustainable living practices.	Activities fostered by influencers showcasing their sustainable lifestyle changes elicited more positive results.
Brand Collaboration (Eco-conscious)	4.2%	Promoting easily sustainable brands during collaborations.	Moderate popularity within eco-conscious followers.
Education (Educational Facts)	7.5%	Providing environmental information and tips for sustainable DIY projects.	Popular when paired with interactive elements like polls and quizzes.

## 2.8. Key Insights

### 2.8.1. Popularity of Practical and Educational Content

Posts with practical tips and educational content about environmental issues were popular; the increased audience engagement reflects the growing audience demand for actual advice on sustainable living.

### 2.8.2. Engagement with Personal Experiences

Overall, it was found that posts with personal experiences about sustainable initiatives received more engagement than topical, product-specific materials.

### 2.8.3. Effectiveness of Brand Collaborations

Brand collaborations elicited fair interaction from consumers, especially the concerned global environmental citizens.

### 2.8.4. Challenges with Authenticity

However, there was a negative attitude toward fake environmentalism from influencers, highlighting the importance of genuine and authentic communication.

### 2.8.5. Expert Interview Findings

Through interviews with 6 industry professionals, several themes emerged regarding best practices for digital marketing and influencer collaboration in sustainability campaigns:

**Table 3** Key Themes from Expert Interviews

Key Theme	Details
Authenticity	Experts also revealed that there was increased focus on the truth in sustainability; it is crucial that companies' behaviours align with their disclosed communications.
Targeted Analysis	Micro-influencers who have higher levels of audience interaction and relevancy were viewed as being more credible in sustainability messaging
	Compared to macro-influencers.
Consumer Trust	Extensive consumer trust can be attained by the engagement of influencers who have credibility within environmentally conscious consumer channels.
Interactive Campaigns	Therefore, the type of campaign that encourages interaction (such as a challenge or a poll) would generate a larger level of interaction and help engagement with consumers.

## 2.9. Key Insights

### 2.9.1. Influencer Selection

The choices of the influencers should therefore be done carefully for sustainable campaigns based on the fact that there is a notion that micro-influencers, those with less than 100,000 followers, are likely to be more genuine.

### 2.9.2. Engagement through Interactive Content

Quizzes, webinars, and live Q&A sessions greatly activated the consumers, pre-championing the theme on sustainability.

### 2.9.3. Consumer Trust and Authenticity

Consumers' trust remains critical since fake messages to certain audiences will make them reluctant to access information.

### 2.9.4. Impact of Greenwashing

Experts noted that the misuse of the sustainability concept, also known as greenwashing, or publications that were overly filled with promotions led to a lesser level of engagement. On the other hand, using honest and genuine communication and promoting credibility levels was helpful.

## 2.10. Visual Representations

### 2.10.1. Figure 1: Engagement by Content Type

This bar chart shows the average engagement rates for different forms of sustainability influencer content. The data points are based on 30 influencer posts of sustainability content curated in both Instagram and TikTok.

### 2.10.2. Figure 2: Case Study Consumer Engagement across Brands

This is the line graph of consumer engagement level of the four case study brands. Consumer engagement is calculated in terms of likes, shares, and comments over three months of the brands' digital campaigns.

- *Note: Engagement metrics are based on likes, shares, and comments over a 3-month period for each brand's digital campaigns.*

## 2.11. Summary of Results

### 2.11.1. Effective Digital Strategies

The brands that participated in product promotion and sharing valuable knowledge, as well as using real influencers, noticed increased consumer engagement. Patagonia and IKEA were leaders in promoting sustainable consumption.

### 2.11.2. Content Type

Consumers are more interested in educational and lifestyle-focused messages, as they wish to learn how to be more sustainable in their daily lives.

### 2.11.3. Influencer Impact

Social media influencers, particularly micro-influencers, obtained significantly better engagement from audiences than macro-influencers, as consumers were more trusting and attentive to those affiliated with a particular subculture.

---

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. Interpretation of Results in Relation to the Thesis

The study affirms that sustainable consumption is positively influenced by digital marketing and influencer tactics. Examples of such approaches are the Patagonia Company and the IKEA Company that show that long-term goals oriented on sustainability, which should be conveyed through the Internet sites, contribute to consumers' activation and motivation.

Studies of content analysis show that educational topics and messages related to an appropriate lifestyle have the highest level of engagement. It shows that people appreciate education and self-identification within sustainable consumption carries more weight than promotion-focused ones.

It also reveals that micro and mid-level influencers who have significant audiences' engagement perform better than the macro influencers in terms of changing the audience's behaviour. Such influencers are more useful in promoting sustainable practices among consumers and gaining their trust.

### 3.2. Comparison with Previous Studies

This study gives meaning to the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, in consonance with the studies on the engagement of digital marketing in sustainability. Kapoor et al. (2021) also confirmed that the sustainability efforts focusing on the authenticity or the transparency received more consumer attention, proved this study by brands such as Patagonia that the attentions improves the interaction and behaviour.

In the same way, the study of Jackson and Schuler (2020) also specifically addressed the usefulness of educational materials and this current research builds on this particular finding by proving that sustainability tips via influencers generate increased user engagement. In terms of sustainable practices, consumers prefer the recommendations made by influencers than any commercial message.

Last of all, this work is in agreement with Freberg et al. (2011), as it states that micro-influencers are more effective than macro-influencers in the light of perceived genuineness. Micro-influencers are considered more credible, as there has been a shift towards meaningful engagements in sustainability related marketing communications.

### 3.3. Significance of the Findings

The study of Miso operates to drive home the truthfulness or falsity in marketing of sustainability. Essentials that brands to embracing sustainable development should enshrine in their online communication and other promotional materials include; Based on research, sustainability marketing should disseminate informative content and promote positive changes that are consistent over time rather than impulse sales, build consumer goodwill.

The research also estimates the value of micro-influencers utilized to target more sustainable audiences. It is cheaper and improves consumer trust and engagement opposed to macro-influencers.

Further, the study looks at how communicative contents like challenges, poll, and campaigns enhance consumers' engagement and the creation of a community that advocates for sustainable living.

### *Limitations of the Study*

While this study offers valuable insights into digital marketing and influencers' roles in promoting sustainability, several limitations are noted:

- **Scope of Case Studies:** The study was based on four brands, Patagonia, The Body Shop, IKEA and Everlane which are all sustainability oriented firms hence its generalization to other industries or different countries was limited. Further research studies could also focus on other brands that are not limit to emerging markets brands and small to medium enterprises brands.
- **Dependence on Secondary Data:** It is also founded on secondary data exclusively, which might have missed fine strategies of future campaigns or consumer feedback inaccessible to the public. Future research might find it useful if the authors utilize inside the campaign data or customer feedback.
- **Absence of Consumer Surveys:** In the absence of the surveys, the research does not get a direct view of the consumers and their incentives towards sustainability. More research could include surveys to help get further sociopsychological scrutiny on behaviours and perceptions by the consumers.
- **Limited Geographical Scope:** Namely, it can be discussed that such an approach of cooperating only with the international brands, which use digital media platforms may cover insufficient range of sustainable practices in different cultural or geographical contexts. Future researchers should try to understand changes in consumers' reaction and general impact of digital marketing campaigns across the globe

---

#### 4. Conclusion

Aspects related to this topic of the impact of digital marketing and influencer marketing on sustainable consumer behavior were the focus of this research. The results support three crucial aspects: authenticity, information content, and the focus of the message on the presented lifestyles. However, the research also identified 35 micro-influencers from Pinterest who engaged, and possibly trusted, their audiences better than macro-influencers. Organisations like Patagonia and IKEA, those offering constant and authentic sustainable communication, amplify customer relations.

For companies the following suggestions were provided: becoming sustainability committed credibly, adopting good content and partnering with micro-bloggers. However, such limitations as the lack of primary data and the limited number of respondents suggest that the research should continue.

#### *Future Research Directions*

The subsequent studies shall investigate the customers' response, practices across the industries, cultural variations, and consequences of SM over a period of time using traditional media along with modern-day techniques.

This work aimed at exploring digital marketing and influencers' contributions to sustainability, using four fashion brands, including Patagonia, The Body Shop, IKEA, and Everlane, and social media content. Relevant success factors include being authentic, transparent and providing educational communication. Lifestyle tips, user-generated content, and challenges are more effective to promote compared to traditional influencer campaigns.

While this involves the use of secondary data, and a limited focus area, the research highlights the viability and relevance of micro influencers, engaging content, and cogent messaging in promoting durable change with consumers.

---

#### Compliance with ethical standards

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

---

#### References

- [1] Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90–92.
- [2] Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (2020). *Organizational sustainability: Research and practice*. Oxford University Press.
- [3] Kapoor, K., Jayasimha, K., & Kumar, S. (2021). Sustainability marketing: Evolving perspectives and practices. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 29(3), 310– 330.
- [4] Patagonia. (2024). Environmental activism through corporate responsibility. Retrieved from [www.patagonia.com](http://www.patagonia.com).

- [5] The Body Shop. (2024). Cruelty-free commitment and sustainable sourcing practices. Retrieved from [www.thebodyshop.com](http://www.thebodyshop.com).
- [6] IKEA. (2024). Sustainable living initiatives. Retrieved from [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com).
- [7] Everlane. (2024). Radical transparency in fashion. Retrieved from [www.everlane.com](http://www.everlane.com).

## Appendices

- Appendix A: Case Study Overview

Brand	Sustainability Concern	Key Digital Marketing Strategy	Media Involvement	Consumer Interaction
Patagonia	Environmental conservation, recycling	Authentic storytelling	educational Environmentalists	High
The Body Shop	Cruelty-free products, ethical sourcing	Community narratives, user submissions	Beauty gurus	Moderate
IKEA	Circular economy, sustainable living	Lifestyle-focused influencer partnerships	Home décor enthusiasts	High
Everlane	Transparency, fair wages, sustainability	Product-focused influencer campaigns	Sustainable fashion advocates	Moderate

- Appendix B: Engagement Metrics by Content Type

Content Type	Engagement Rate	Message Focus	Engagement Insights
Product Promotion	5.4%	Sustainable product integration	Moderate engagement, practical use emphasized
Lifestyle Change	6.1%	Sustainable living tips	Highly effective, lifestyle integration preferred
Brand Collaboration	4.2%	Brand-specific sustainability	Modest interaction, niche audience appeal
Educational Content	7.5%	Environmental facts and DIY tips	Strong interaction, especially with interactive tools

- Appendix C: Expert Interview Key Insights

Theme	Insight
Authenticity	Alignment between behavior and communication is essential.
Targeted Influencing	Micro-influencers perform better than macro-influencers in credibility.
Interactive Campaigns	Interactive elements like quizzes and polls enhance consumer engagement.